

**“Walk In The Light Of Hope”  
Isaiah 2:1-5  
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Marquette, MI  
December 2<sup>nd</sup> 2007**

Okay who has their Christmas tree up already? I do! It is something that I do every year, following Thanksgiving Day. Okay it's not this one but you get the point. That Friday instead of getting up at 5 AM and rushing out to the mall, I take the time along with the boys and we put our tree up. Partly it is practical, because if it doesn't get done then I really don't know when it will get done, but partly it is out of my anticipation of what is to come. I love the trees, the lights, the music. The sooner we can get started with it the better in my book. Why do you ask? The message of hope!

As we begin this advent season, the one thing that all of us can agree upon is that the coming of Christmas is about hope. What we will hope for will be different things for different people. Some will hope for that new big screen TV, others will hope for snow along with good weather, others will hope they get mashed potatoes, and others will hope simply to be with family or friends, while others will hope that they simply make it through another day. We as Christians have a unique opportunity this time every year to bring hope to those who need it so desperately. We have shaped the culture enough to this point to be in a prime position to convey that message of hope, of promised coming and the fact that God is faithful.

We many of us will complain, and rightly so, that Christmas has become so commercial and that before Halloween is even over, the decorations go up. On the other hand with

the consumerist questions aside, I always ask the question, What is wrong with the lights? When we read in our Isaiah passage there is a great hope that is anticipated. The hope of one who will come one sent from the Lord, who will teach in his ways and guide us on the path. If that does not anticipate hope, then I don't know what does. All through out the year we are dealing with stuff. And we now live in more anxious times than many can remember. With the state of our economy, tensions around the world, engaged now in a war that has lasted longer than World War II, family tension, infidelity, and the list can go on and on. One thing we can count on is the lights. Advent is here, and we let our light shine. When we let the light shine we in that simple act of hanging and plugging them in and flipping the switch is a reminder that we have hope, and anything that communicates the message of hope is okay in my book.

What we must focus on is where our hope lies. Just as Isaiah describes, this year, like last year many people will be flocking to church, looking for an answer, probably to a question they don't even know they are asking, Where is our hope? One of the confusions of this time of year is that we put our hope in the dollar, in getting the exact right present, to communicate our love to the person we are giving to. Stores count on this every year to make their money and remain open for next year. But we know that no amount of money, no gift will truly satisfy. Money runs out, so we seek to make more, clothes wear out, gadgets and devices will eventually give out and need to be replaced. What we get this Christmas we know will not last. As we journey together we walk in the light of Hope, trusting that God will bring us hope as God has in the past, and we can be assured will do again.

Others who are seeking that truly religious aspect often times find themselves putting their hope in the wrong place as well.

Florence MacKenzie writes this about holiness vs. legalism in the Spring 2007 issue (21) of *Just Between Us*:

A third myth, and possibly the most common one, reduces holiness to following a list of man-made do's and don'ts. This counterfeit holiness is known as legalism. While holiness consists of obediently responding to God's principles for living, legalism means religious rules made by people are seen as absolute values. The Bible makes it clear that we are to live pure lives (Philippians 4:8; 1 Timothy 5:22; 1 John 3:3).

Therefore, as Christians we need to be very careful about what we allow into our minds. If we're wise, we'll set reasonable boundaries regarding what sort of movies we'll watch, for example. This is a good and responsible thing to do.

However, the legalist might reason in the following way: "I might suffer mind pollution if I watch certain movies; therefore, to avoid this, I won't watch any movies at all. In fact, watching movies isn't good for anyone, so no one, especially Christians, should watch them. Going to the movies, therefore, is wrong, as is watching a DVD at home."

Legalism fails to take account of the fact that, even if we choose not to watch any movies, we're still in danger of failing to live a pure life if we don't keep a check on our thought life. Legalistic rules often end up obscuring the biblical principles they were

intended to uphold; not watching movies becomes the standard rather than obedience to a biblical definition of purity.<sup>1</sup>

Is not putting our lights on or our tree up, or listening to Christmas music before December, the standard, or is it our focus on the one we are called to follow. All of these are intended to point us to the coming of Christ.

On this first Sunday of Advent, as we have placed the animals in the stable, and as we have lit the candle of Hope, let us remember that the hope we walking in the light of is, in fact, the light of the world, whom has come is with us, and will come again. “Let us walk in the light of the Lord.”

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<sup>1</sup> From Homiletics November/December 2007